

PEDAGOGY OR IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE? AN EXAMINATION OF PUPILS' AND TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS FOR TALK IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This paper draws on research into teachers and pupils' perceptions of talk in school. Drawing on socio-cultural perspectives, it shows that expectations of talk are grounded in particular socio-cultural values that represent hegemonic interpretations of the quality of talk and classroom discourse. Although much has been written about classroom talk, the pupils' voice is often absent from discussion. The children in this study revealed very different views of the expectations of talk from that of their teachers'. In particular, they appeared uncertain about whether their teachers liked them to talk but they seemed very clear that the teacher was in control of the talk. Despite pupils' enthusiasm for talk, their teachers held negative views of certain pupils' performance. It is argued that both pupils' and teachers' expectations are guided more by their own perceptions of an ideal state than by pedagogic or heuristic motives.

Key words: classroom discourse; interaction; social disadvantage; talk

Introduction

Study of children's language has tended to focus on children's performance - the skills or lack of skill that children display (Locke, Ginsberg and Peers, 2002; Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1987) and on the interaction between teacher and children in the classroom (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1994; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Hardman & Mroz, 1999). Research has tended to focus on children's behaviour in interactional exchanges and the nature of these exchanges, ignoring the perspectives that participants bring to these exchanges. Yet, patterns of language use are culturally determined by those who use them and the context within which they are located. Moreover, it is by learning to use these semiotic tools that learners learn to take part in those activities that rely on such tools and thus gain access to the discourse practices of the school. Through their participation in activities, children learn how to use cognitive and communicative functions. Their interpretations of the social context are important indications of why they act in particular ways. Rather than looking for the reasons within the child or teaching strategy, it is important to consider the interpersonal relations. Furthermore, on a

more individual level, language itself is a symbolic tool and, as such, cannot be neutral. Talk in different contexts involves many tacit expectations reflecting the socio-cultural experience the individual brings to the situation. In the classroom, the teacher's perception of his/her role and the pupils' perceptions of their role will impact on the nature of the discourse. Situated within a socio-cultural understanding of teaching and learning, this study explores the perceptions that both teachers and children may bring to classroom interaction.

Background

Recent research has focused both on the unsatisfactory standard of oral language that children display on starting school and criticism of the opportunities to talk that children have in school. Language is central to learning: it is through language that learning is mediated. The dominant theory of pedagogy current in UK classrooms is based on the Vygotskian theory of mediated action. Central to this is the concept of the 'zone of proximal development' whereby learners acquire and internalise knowledge through the support and 'scaffolding' of more experienced others. Bernstein (1993) criticises Vygotsky's view of development as privileging the acquisition of the 'tool' rather than the social context of the acquisition. He argues that once development is viewed more broadly than the zpd, 'the space for pedagogising becomes a site for ideological struggle' (pxvii). These data show that both pupils' and teachers' expectations are guided more by their own perceptions of an ideal state than by pedagogic or heuristic motives.

Quality of oral language

In recent years there has been increasing concern expressed about the quality of children's spoken language as they start formal schooling with considerable press coverage of the reported poor language skills of young children. 'Not on speaking terms: why do so many children lack basic language skills? (Daily Telegraph, 3/4/2004) and government inspector says 'parents have raised worst generation

yet –' (Sunday Telegraph, 31/8/2003). However, such reports are disputed by those involved in the assessment of children's early language. Gold (2003) reports that baseline test figures for four-year-olds show that, since 1997, most school scores for four-year-olds show either no change or slight improvement. The reason for this disparity can perhaps be explained by differences in perceptions and expectations. The sources of the newspaper headlines are surveys of headteachers (Basic Skills Agency, 2002) and nursery teachers (Nursery World, 2004) and therefore necessarily represent only one general perspective.

Such deficit views of children's language may provide some explanation for the very real problem of a cycle of disadvantage. There is considerable research evidence that claims to illustrate that children brought up in poverty have poorer spoken language skills than children in more favourable circumstances (Locke et al, 2002). Moreover, there is a well-reported link between disadvantage and low achievement (Whitehurst, 1997). Statistical analyses of test and exam results of pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged areas show persistently low attainment. Furthermore, the gap increases over time. Thus, judgements of spoken language competence at pre-school can trigger a cycle of underachievement (Locke and Peers, 2000). The argument that the fault lies in the home background should be challenged. Research has shown that, from an early age, those children who do not bring the appropriate cultural capital to school are at a disadvantage. As early as 1980s, research was providing evidence of how the gap between home and school language owed as much to low or different expectations in school than to any deficit in the home. In UK, the work of the Bristol Language Project (Wells, 1983, 1987) and the research of Tizard and Hughes (1984) provided illustrations of the quality of home language, even in homes where previously it was thought to be limited. Both studies also indicate that language used in interaction between teachers and children was often more limited than in the home. This resulted in teachers making unfavourable assessments of children's linguistic capabilities. In

USA, Brice-Heath (1983) in her seminal ethnographic study showed how different patterns of language use in the home led to differential success in school. Kelly, Gregory and Williams (2002) pose the following pertinent question:

(D)oes the problem of low achievement lie in inadequate parental involvement or in inadequate recognition by schools of the different strengths that children might bring with them from their homes and communities? (p.67)

This is supported by Lareau (2003) whose 'naturalistic observations' in home and school revealed important differences in language and child rearing styles between the different home backgrounds. Her work shows that schools' view of child rearing, which she describes as the middle-class model of 'concerted cultivation', privileged the middle-class families as they were more likely to fit into this model. She concludes, 'It is the ways that institutions function that ends up conveying advantage to middle-class children' (p.160). Hasan (2002) too has studied the home language patterns of mothers and children and has shown how different practices favour children differentially allowing some children 'easier engagement with the specialised discourses of the school'. She goes on to argue that 'although educational systems claim to provide equal opportunity for all to acquire the competence for engaging in specialised activities, this remains an ideal goal, as yet never achieved in reality, anywhere' (p.125).

Classroom discourse

One such 'specialised activity' is the particular type of discourse shown to be prevalent in classrooms. This pattern, that Tharp and Gallimore (1988) call the 'recitation script' is a three part, teacher led interaction consisting of initiation which is usually a teacher question, a response from the child and a follow up move in which the teacher provides some form of feedback (often an evaluation) –

otherwise referred to as IRF or triadic discourse. This pattern of opening and closing moves retains the locus of control with the teacher who initiates the topic and passes judgement on each student's response. It is argued that interactions of this kind leave little opportunity for children to explore and develop their own interpretations.

However, the control does not remain only within the specific interaction and subject of the lesson. It is pervasive. 'Habits of mind are being displayed, conveyed and modified, often without any deliberate intention or conscious awareness' (Wells and Claxton, 2002, p4). Rules of participation established in classroom routines resonate through schooling and beyond. Lemke (1990) argued that this type of interaction serves to control not only pupil behaviour but also the dissemination of knowledge. Mehan (1994) asked whether children who learn to conform through passive participation such as the style of interaction found in many classrooms could ever become active participants in a democratic society.

In response to criticisms of such patterns of classroom interaction, various initiatives have been introduced to improve the quality of the interaction in classrooms. These seek to improve either the teacher's strategies (e.g. DfES 2003) or how children participate (e.g. Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999). However, despite these and earlier attempts to redefine the nature of classroom discourse, the IRF pattern continues to prevail. It has been shown by many studies to be an enduring pattern of classroom interaction at all ages of schooling (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1994; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Hardman & Mroz, 1999). There is evidence that children learn these styles of interaction through participation in classroom discourse – in the same way as they learn other forms of discourse through social interaction (Skidmore, 2000). Haworth (1999) found that children's group talk around texts followed the same monologic discourse patterns as their teacher's.

Thus, interaction between teacher and pupils is seen not only as an activity influenced by intrapersonal capacity and teaching method but as interpersonal engagement, in which both parties interpret each other's intentions.

The research

The project was funded by a local education authority in the south of England and the University of Exeter. It was initiated by a 'pyramid' of schools (one secondary school with its 6 feeder infant/junior/primary schools - see table one) from Havenlock (pseudonym), a socially disadvantaged area, whose headteachers were concerned about the poor level of oral language of some of their pupils. The initial research question was, 'Are the language skills of the children in this area worse than elsewhere?' The university based research team added a further question, 'Do teachers and children have a shared understanding of what 'good' talk means and how it is achieved?' Therefore, in addition to the vocabulary test that the schools had requested, the study investigated pupils' and teachers' understanding of the role of talk in school.

In June 2004, 189 pupils aged five, eight or twelve years were tested using the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS) and a survey of pupils' views of talk was conducted using a questionnaire developed by Bearne (1998). The test and questionnaires were administered by the class teachers and were anonymous except in the case of the youngest children. For these children, who could not respond in writing, ancillary support staff, who were familiar to the children, read the questions and recorded their answers. Clearly such practice offers a threat to the validity of the responses. However, the responses from the eight-year-old and twelve-year-old pupils showed little evidence of giving the answers that teachers would have liked to see, although the youngest children did show evidence of giving more positive responses to the questions. Nevertheless, the interviews, conducted

outside the classroom and by a researcher, show very similar responses to those gained from the questionnaire survey.

TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

In January 2005, follow up interviews were conducted with the teachers (8) and small group interviews undertaken with focus groups of pupils (64) from the classes that had completed the questionnaires six months earlier. Only in the case of teacher D1 was the pattern different. She had changed age groups during the previous six months. Therefore, whereas her class of 4/5 year-olds took the BPVS tests and did the questionnaire, her current class of 8-9 year olds was interviewed in January 2005. The interviews were conducted by a research fellow who has extensive experience interviewing teachers and children. All interviews were audio-taped. The children were selected by their teachers from those identified as being within the normal range of ability but excluded any child considered too shy. Allowing the teachers to choose who was interviewed represents a potential threat to validity as it risked excluding those very children whose perceptions may be at odds with teacher expectations. Nevertheless, a range of views were expressed by the children and every attempt was made by the researcher not to lead the responses. The child interviews were conducted in a location outside the classroom and in all-boy or all-girl groups. Both interview schedules had been trialled in a different school. One aspect that arose from the trial was that the youngest children had difficulty understanding what was meant by the term 'talk'. In the project itself, children were first shown pictures of children talking in a range of school and home settings in order to orientate them to the topic. The interview questions varied slightly for each year group but focused on children's attitudes to talk; their knowledge of expectations for talk with teachers, with peers and with adults in their home; and, their understanding of the quality of talk.

The teacher interviews were conducted by the same research fellow on the same day as the pupil interviews. They followed a semi-structured format and explored teachers' expectations for children's oral language, their opinions of children's use of language and their thoughts on how it could be improved. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were conducted in private. Teachers were aware that the test data had shown that their pupils' results on the BPVS were no different from children elsewhere. This may have made them more eager to justify their original hypothesis that the language performance was poor.

Analysis

BPVS results were compared with national norms for each age group. One way unrelated ANOVAs were used to analyse the relationship between test score and school attended and year group. Pupil questionnaire responses were coded and subject to a content analysis. Codes were derived from the responses children gave and a proportion of the questionnaires was coded by both the lead researcher and the research fellow. An inter-rater reliability of 95.5% was achieved. Two data reduction approaches were employed with both sets of interview data. First, the interviews with teachers and pupils were transcribed and coded at an initial level according to teachers' and students' responses to the topics raised by the researcher. Second, both sets of data were analysed inductively with codes arising from the data. Findings were then cross referenced.

Results

The results of the BPVS test showed no significant difference between the sample and national norms for the age group. Means for all three year groups achieved scores of around 100 indicating no evidence of unusually low receptive vocabulary. However, standard deviations show that within each school, individual scores are spread out, both below and above the mean.

TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

Results of the ANOVAs showed no significant difference between BPVS test scores and school attended ($F=1.521$, $df=6$, $p=0.173$ ns), or between BPVS test scores and year group ($F=.834$, $df=2$, $p=0.436$ ns). No relationship was found between scores on BPVS and pupils' attitudes to talk as indicated in the questionnaire survey. Chi square was used to test the relationship between BPVS test scores and responses to the questionnaire questions, but no statistically significant relationships were found. Thus, although there was a range of individual scores on the BPVS tests, these differences were not statistically significant at the group level, despite teachers' impressions otherwise. Clearly, further analysis was needed to explore the reasons for teachers' perceptions.

Teacher interviews

The teacher interviews were first analysed according to responses to questions about children's oral language, their opinions of children's use of language and their thoughts on how this could be improved. Each teacher's views were summarised. Subsequently, each statement made by the teachers was coded according to their perceptions in the following categories: what children need in order to learn or to improve their language; how teachers and teaching can contribute to this; how families contribute to this; statements about talk itself and what it should be like; statements about school and how it helps or hinders development of talk. The teacher summaries and the coded statements were then cross-referenced and the following main findings identified.

All teachers mentioned confidence as being an important aspect of children's talk, whether this was self-confidence or feeling comfortable with the context and audience. Two specifically mentioned that in mixed aged classes the younger children could feel inhibited. There was a feeling that children should not be put

under pressure when talking. The context should be unthreatening. Children's talk should be respected and listened to. The topic was also said to matter: whether it was interest in the topic or ownership of the topic. Sometimes this comment was made in a disparaging way, 'all they can talk about is Playstation games'. This criticism was less evident with teachers of the youngest children.

There was no general agreement as to what constitutes good talking. There was more mention of non-linguistic features as constituting good talk, such as being quiet and polite rather than linguistic features such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary. Four of the seven teachers described good talking as quiet, two related it to manners, one to cleverness and three to talking about the right sort of things. This demonstrates the power of cultural expectations. 'We do talk about things like 'are you being polite' or 'do you think you should face this way?' (C).

When asked how children get to be good talkers, four teachers mentioned home influences only, one made a brief mention of the impact of school experience, two referred to both home and school (in both cases home was mentioned first) and one teacher referred to school only. When asked how children's talk develops, teachers gave a range of answers from just 'by talking' to having interesting things to talk about (see table 3). Similarly, when asked about how they could support children's development as talkers, a range of answers were given as can be seen in table 4. The three early years teachers talked a lot about intervention strategies such as talk games, circle time and so on. The four teachers of eight/nine year olds all stressed the role of parents. Five referred to making expectations explicit but no teacher implied this was an important strategy. Use of words such as plan, teach, explain, train was unusual.

TABLES THREE AND FOUR ABOUT HERE

All except one early years teacher attributed the poor language, at least in part, to parents. They commented on single parents not being able to cope, too much shouting. Six of the eight felt children spent too much time in front of the TV. Two alluded to low socio-economic home backgrounds and six of the eight mentioned the poor socio-economic character of the particular area. There was almost general reference to some of 'these' children's home backgrounds. Homes were criticised for too much TV and Playstation; not enough discussion or use of good language; not enough interesting experiences for children to draw on in talk.

These data present a complex picture, with the close relationship between cultural expectations and language evident. On the one hand, teachers were concerned that pupils feel comfortable and confident to talk in class but on the other hand they were critical of how some pupils use language. Only one of the eight teachers gave any detail of planned explicit activities that they employed to support the development of children's talk. In any other subject this would be considered highly unusual.

Child questionnaires

Despite their teachers' opinions to the contrary, 84% of pupils said they were good at talking. When asked who they knew who was good at talking, they named a friend or family member. Only 5 children out of the 183 who completed the questionnaire named a teacher or other school based adult. When asked what they liked to talk about, the overwhelming impression was that children love to talk and talk about anything and everything. Girls were more likely to talk about friends and activities, 'Everything you could imagine e.g. boys, peeps, shopping, clothes, hair, TV, who's going out with who, horrible teachers, sports, secrets' (twelve year old girl). Boys talked less about friends and more about sport but also talked about activities, 'Lessons, footie, problems, teachers' (twelve-year-old boy). Boys were also more likely to cite popular culture characters than girls.

In response to the question, 'What talking do you do in school?' pupils showed a developing awareness of how talk in school is constrained. Answers were coded as traditional school talk such as about lessons or about work, talk with friends/self or at playtime and those that referred to both. (25% did not answer this question or answered in a way that did not fit the classification e.g. 'not much' or 'quiet'). The proportion of answers stayed remarkably the same within the five-year-old and eight/ nine-year-old groups with more children (42 & 43%) referring to traditional school talk as compared to non-school talk (16 & 17%). By secondary school, pupils were better able to articulate about talk of both kinds. The reception children gave answers such as 'we talk about work and stuff' or the more particular 'we talk about drums and stuff'. Some were revealing, for example 'school talking, like answering questions'. Others focused on how to talk. Quiet talk was considered important and politeness, for example, 'talk to teacher nicely and don't make any fusses'. The seven/eight-year-old children were clearer about the distinction between work and play talk, mentioning talk with friends and 'talk when you put your hand up'. The secondary school pupils gave fuller replies and could describe both types of talk, 'I talk to the teacher when asked and I always talk about football.'

The question as to whether their teacher liked them to talk revealed a developing awareness of who controls the amount and topic of classroom talk (table 5). The youngest children were most confident that their teacher liked them to talk.

TABLE FIVE ABOUT HERE

The number who answered 'sometimes' increased over years - 27%; 47%; 82% - presumably as they gained awareness of the expectations of teachers. These 'sometimes' answers were mostly negative, such as 'not much' or 'only on the playground'. The oldest pupils realised it could depend on the teacher and/or on the

lesson/whether you put your hand up/your behaviour/whether you had made a good comment. Pupils were aware of the teacher's power, making comments such as: 'when I am working with her', 'when she wants me to talk' and the capriciousness of it, 'some days'.

The answers to 'When shouldn't you talk?' were categorised as those who just gave a general answer such as 'in lessons'; those who said when it would be inappropriate or impractical such as 'When she tells you to put your fingers up and wriggle your fingers above your head', 'When the teacher doesn't want me to talk (8 year-old girl)' and; those who said it would be impolite, e.g. when someone else is talking. By seven/eight years of age they have learned when they can and when they cannot talk sometimes citing different occasions such as 'in maths' or 'in assembly'. The seven/eight year olds attributed most to teacher control. By eleven and twelve years of age they were more specific – which lessons, which activities.

Child interviews

The interviews with children followed up on the questionnaires six months later and explored further their perceptions of talk. The findings are very similar and give further illustration of a largely shared understanding about what kinds of talk are expected in the classroom. A picture emerges of children who love to talk and who talk confidently and enthusiastically with their peers but who recognise clearly that teachers, and to a lesser extent other adults, control when and how they talk in school. Although the interviews took place in separate boy/girl groups, very little difference was found between the boys and the girls in what they said. This reflects the findings from the survey data. All the children from youngest to oldest knew the kinds of things they like to talk about. These are things that interest them personally and as a group with their peers eg. popular culture, sports and activities, holidays, birthdays, friendships and gossip, special interests, funny things and

jokes, pets, games to play. They also talked about school and lessons but not so much about the work involved as about events during lessons.

They were clearly aware of how, at school, teachers have many rules about when you can and cannot talk. Repeatedly children of all ages explained how you cannot talk in whole class lessons, during reading, in assembly, when doing work, during tests, and when the teacher is talking. They knew that they are supposed to talk during show and tell and circle time. They explained that they have to answer the teacher's questions and talk with their talk partners when the teacher tells them to. They also recognised that they have to wait to be chosen to talk and not everyone gets picked. 'I wanted to have a go and I never really get a go at talking' [eight/nine year old boy]. The following interchange between the researcher and four eight-year-old boys illustrates their awareness of their position in classroom discourse:

Researcher: Does your teacher like you to talk in class?

Boy 1: No.

Researcher: No?

Boy 1: Only if she asks a question that's when we're allowed to talk.

.....

Researcher: OK. And what kind of talking is that that you do when she asks questions.

Boy 3: About the work, about work and stuff, especially in maths.

Researcher: Yeah? Especially in maths? Tell me about maths then, what kind of talk is it do you think?

Boy 3: We, we do um revision and adding.

Boy 1: And times.

Boy 3: Yeah, she writes down the answers and we have to - she writes down the question and we have to put an answer.

Boy 2: And we have to put our hand up and answer it.

(School E boys)

How you talk was also seen as usually prescribed by adults. Teachers were said to be concerned with talking 'kindly' 'nicely' 'politely' 'friendlily' 'gently' 'quietly', 'whispering', 'properly, pronounce words correctly', 'slowly' 'no slang, no swearing, no jokes'. They reported that sometimes they have to talk loudly in class – but only when the teacher tells them to, 'if you can't stop talking she'll tell you that you're too loud, but if you're so quiet when you're speaking [...] then she'll ask you to shout it' [eight/ nine year old girl]. They recognised that talking the way the teacher wants (usually quietly) is rewarded by special privileges and there was some recognition that rewards and punishments for talking can depend on the mood of the teacher.

The responses of both teachers and children that related to the quality of talk can be categorised according to the extent to which, linguistic, social and cultural or academic concerns predominated. Table 6 shows that for both teachers and children non-linguistic concerns prevail. For children, in particular, this related to talk in school and arose in response to questions such as, 'How does your teacher like you to talk?' and 'Who does your teacher think is a good talker? and 'Why?'

TABLE SIX ABOUT HERE

Socio-cultural expectations of linguistic behaviour

Bernstein wrote, 'development is maturation plus instruction: Exit Piaget: enter the pedagogue' (Bernstein, 1993, p.xv). He argued that theories such as those of Piaget and Chomsky placed the source of competence in the way the mind is constructed. This locates 'linguistic and cognitive development outside of culture and, therefore, outside of power and discursive regulation' (p.xxi). Yet, classrooms are sites imbued with cultural historical expectations of the roles and practices adopted

therein. The views of the children and teachers in this small group of schools demonstrate how firmly rooted are teachers' beliefs about language and pedagogy. The data also indicate that the experience that children have of classroom discourse leaves them in no doubt about the power relationships at play. Two main issues seem worth examining in relation to the ideological positions represented by the data. The first relates to these teachers' and children's ideas about the quality of talk and how it is learned. The second relates to how talk is used in classroom discourse and the implications of this for children's learning.

Language is an ever-present part of social interactions. As such it can seem invisible and neutral. However, as a cultural artefact it can never be neutral. These teachers presented taken for granted assumptions about the quality of talk – what teacher F described as 'good value talking'. They expressed clearly articulated opinions of those children whose talk matched their expectations and those who did not,

'They either range from being um excellent talkers, confident, fluent and well able to express themselves, or, quite the other extreme.... Yeah, because they can only talk in terms of 'nice' or 'big', um, and everything (pause) is – no, not everything, but an awful lot is interspersed with a 'yeah, yeah, yeah' or 'well' or you know, a variation of that (D1).

Although they recognised that children talk more fluently about topics of interest to themselves, some teachers expressed this as a criticism if the topic did not accord with their topics of interest. They commented disparagingly about children's enthusiasm for talking about their Playstation games or TV programmes.

They find it quite hard to describe things, they've got quite a limited descriptive vocabulary unless you really, really, really pull

it out of them a lot of the time. Well, I suppose technically they can talk about Play Station games really well, um, they can talk about TV programmes that they've watched. (D2)

They also associated good talking (or talking in the way teachers expect) as being a sign of being a good pupil. Teacher F is not unusual when she judged two children in her class as good talkers because, 'they always are able to talk very clearly and give right answers and they are clever and all their work is right'.

These normative views about how these teachers like children to talk are reinforced by their deficit view of the home experiences of those children who do not match their version of the ideal. No teacher gave any indication that they had any experience of having visited any of the homes but they expressed very firm beliefs of what the homes were like. There seems clear evidence of teachers' expectations being linked with a particular view of childhood and parenting. These teachers seemed to imply that children whose homes were more like their own childhood were better; that pupils from these homes used language better. Like Lareau (ibid) shows, these teachers also support a model of 'concerted cultivation'.

'If you encourage children to read and to communicate with other people and not just play you know in isolation, then it goes without saying that you're going to develop your speech more, aren't you? And I always played with other young children and I joined lots of clubs, and was a member of lots of different activities. I would say that's probably the best way' (G).

The evidence presented here gives clear indications about the implications for those children who come to school without already having some facility with the language and discourse patterns expected in school. The small group of teachers in this study were all, without doubt, deeply concerned to do the best for the pupils in their

classes. Also, if the evidence from the studies cited above is to be believed, they were not unusual in their negative judgements of children's language. One of the teachers had to break off before the end of the interview as her distress was so great when she talked about the language difficulties experienced by some children in her class. However, despite, or perhaps because of this concern, her expectations for the pupils were limited.

There is no evidence from the pupil interviews or questionnaires that these deficit views of certain home backgrounds were known by pupils. The children mainly described themselves as good at talking and were enthusiastic about talking with peers. However, it can be seen quite clearly that children have developed very clear impressions about how and when they should talk in school; that the timing and topics of conversation are prescribed in lessons. A little girl spoke of not being allowed to talk when the teacher 'wiggled her fingers'. Older children recognised that it depended on which teacher and, even, how the teacher was feeling, 'not when she has a headache'. Although they recognised that any talking in class should be about the topic of the lesson, they showed little enthusiasm for this. Their talk was about topics that mattered to them: their interests and what they were planning to do in their leisure time. Several pupils spoke enthusiastically about 'Golden Time' which was awarded when children had worked or behaved well. In 'Golden Time we talk all the time because it's a time that we can just play and not - not work and play games with your friends and talk to them about things.... (D1 girls). These children showed a clear understanding of the distinction between their own talk and talk that is expected in school. It is also clear that in the classroom setting they saw the teacher as having control over who talks about what and when. Variations in this pattern were also seen as in the gift of the teacher to be used as reward or sanction.

As discussed earlier, the prevailing pattern of discourse has been shown to involve the IRF pattern. In this the teacher maintains control of the topic of discussion and how the discussion progresses. The feedback response effectively cuts off any diversion from the pattern by acting as a closing move which enables the teacher to move on to the next question. Luke (1992) has described IRF pattern of discourse as 'training of the mouth' (p.126) rather than of the mind. Although the pupils showed they were quite clear about the rules of discussion, teachers appeared less perceptive about the impact their strategies have on pupils. One teacher observed about children's discussion skills,

What amazes me is that very often someone will say is 'oh what's your favourite colour', 'blue' next question, 'what's your favourite football team', 'blarr', you know, and they are one word answers and occasionally we will get a child and someone will say 'have you got any pets', 'yes, I have three guinea pigs and they are called' And they'll fill out an answer, but in general the children I would say a good 75-80% of them, one word answers and they will just do that, question, answer, question, answer. And they won't expand on anything at all. (D2).

Bernstein refers to classrooms as sites for ideological struggle. It is clear from the research literature that teachers share implicit, if not explicit, beliefs about classroom interaction and expectations for language use. These data give illustrations of the underlying expectations they hold based on ideological beliefs about home and school language. However, it can be argued that, this ideological struggle is also an unequal struggle – if struggle it can be termed. The pupils in this project were mostly accepting of the situation as defined by their teachers. It did not seem to blunt much of their enthusiasm for talk. Rather, talk, as a lively, enjoyable, worthwhile part of life experience did not happen in the classroom – unless covertly. The teachers seemed to share a wistful, if not despairing, view of

some students' talk. If talk, in both its linguistic and social quality, did not match with teachers' normative expectations, it was judged unfavourably. Such perceptions of the quality of children's talk must have implications for how children learn to use language in the classroom.

Conclusion

Children learn in social contexts. These contexts are redolent with cultural meanings and practices that position the participants within that context. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) describe such contexts as 'figured worlds' in which the 'objectified meanings, joint activities, and structures of privilege and influence' (p60) are in part contingent on other figured worlds and in part separate from other such worlds. Within the figured world of the classroom, classroom discourse is a culturally constructed activity shaped by the participants. What can be seen from the data presented here is that classroom discourse is shaped less by pedagogic concerns than by cultural expectations of how to thrive in the world of the school classroom. If the findings from this study pertain in other schools, disadvantage is less concerned with linguistic competence so much as linguistic difference. Furthermore, as pupils develop an understanding of how to participate in classroom discourse, they appear to be striving to conform to their interpretation of teachers' expectations which seem to relate as much to social and behavioural issues as cognitive ones.

This study indicates that further exploration of classroom practice and participants' expectations is needed. Programmes designed to improve pupils' and teachers' use of classroom interaction will continue to have limited impact while participants' motives and understandings remain confused. If we are to counteract the pervasiveness of the IRF discourse and break the cycle of disadvantage for those children who do not come to school equipped with the language skills that their teachers value, we need to recognise that the answer lies as much in the

interpersonal relationships as in individual skills or practice of either teachers or children. No programme of language remediation or blueprint for classroom interaction can counteract deep rooted cultural practices which address participants' concerns for their own well being. Individuals are not powerless within social contexts, but change will require pupils to develop their agency within the context. The evidence from this study shows many children exercising agency to get by in the classroom rather than engage with cognitive challenge. For these teachers to value the skills and knowledge that young children bring to school will require them to acquire greater understanding of how language is used and learned. Given the unequal distribution of power in the classroom, teachers will also need to reassess their expectations of the rules of participation – even though this may challenge their cultural interests and expectations.

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